DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 662 CS 012 820

AUTHOR McJamerson, Nanthalia W.; And Others
TITLE "Reconstructing" Lives: A Reading-for-Empowerment Project.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Autobiographies; Change Strategies; Higher Education; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; Social Sciences; *Student Development; *Student Empowerment; *Success
IDENTIFIERS *Reading Uses; South Carolina State University

ABSTRACT

A Reading-for-Empowerment project used a critical social science approach. Phase I of the project was an in-depth study of successful lives to discern the critical factors which lead to success. Four graduate counselor trainees at South Carolina State University examined the autobiographies of Maya Angelou, Zora Neal Hurston, John H. Johnson, and Malcolm X. Six essential factors or "common fibers" were identified and developed into the Success "Fibers" Model of Development. Participants in Phase II of the project read an autobiography of a famous person, analyzed the person's life, reconstructed the person's life, and applied lessons learned about success factors to their own life. Participants completed an open-ended survey and reported development of a sense of empowerment in 4 categories: (1) increased insight; (2) increased encouragement; (3) new awareness of possibilities for personal success; and (4) actual behavior changes and plan for behavior changes to create personal success. Phase III of the project will involve pretests, the project experience and posttest to determine the impact of the project in helping students reach their potential. (Contains five tables and a figure that presents aspects of the project and comments from participants. Appendixes presents a program produced as a result of Phase II of the project, and sample worksheets from Phase III of the project.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 407 662

"RECONSTRUCTING" LIVES:
A Reading-for-Empowerment Project

Nanthalia W. McJamerson, Ph. D.

with

Teacher Trainer - Grambling State University
Counselor Trainees - South Carolina State University

SUCCESS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

2 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Success "Fibers" Model Developers
Mark Dean, Thomas Lawrence, Aprile McCullough,
Nanthalia McJamerson, Claudine Williams
South Carolina State University

Research Participants
ED 300 Educational Psychology Class
Fall 1993
Grambling State University

Project Evaluators
Katrina Boden-Webb, Arlean Chistophe, Lizzie Ferguson
Sarah Frost, Cynthia Gatson, Cassandra Lyles
Grambling State University
Carleen Riley
Harold Clarke
South Carolina State University

Project Consultants
Kathryn Newman, Ph. D.
Loretta Jaggars, Ed. D.
Grambling State University

Editor
Jimmy McJamerson
Grambling State University

ED 372520

"RECONSTRUCTING" LIVES:
A Reading-for-Empowerment Project

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in, and I'll guarantee to take any one of them at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select--doctor,...artist,...beggar-man and thief. (John B. Watson, 1930, p. 104)

If you can control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. (Carter G. Woodson, 1933, p. 84)

There is too much failure among people who have enormous potential for success. Many of us, the teachers, parents and humanitarians, who claim that we are dedicated to helping young people, often feel powerless to solve this problem. The contention of this article is that we cannot develop solutions because we oversimplify success and overemphasize failure. Some of the popular oversimplifications are: "Just believe in yourself." "Just say, 'No'." "The problem is single-parent homes." We do not seem to realize that success is not one dimensional. If we develop a deeper understanding of the multiple interactions and intricate transactions among factors which lead to success, then we can increase the possibilities for success in the lives of young people.

There is a basic assumption undergirding this workbook: If we study success (Wolin and Wolin, 1994) as intensely as we study failure then we will be able to unlease the "arrested development" (Akbar, 1994) and "unbank the fire" (Hale, 1995) in the lives of young people. The workbook, therefore, was developed from the study of success rather than the study of failure.

This "RECONSTRUCTING" FAMOUS LIVES Project had as major goals an increase in our understanding of factors which lead to success and the increase of possibilities for success in the lives of project participants. The project resulted

in two major outcomes. First, the "forensic" search for factors which lead to success produced the identification of essentials "fibers" for achieving success. The "fibers" are described in Figure 1. Secondly, the information about success was taught using a critical teaching approach that led to the empowerment of the project participants.

Figure 1. THE SUCCESS "FIBERS" MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

"Fibers" Essential to Successful Lives: Definitions and Assumptions

ABILITY NURTURE: persons or experiences which reveal, spotlight and/or nurture specific abilities, talents or capabilities in a.person. Possession of ability is worthless if it is not recognized and nurtured.

AMBITION "IGNITION": exposure, event, persons which spark, develop and sustain motivation, inspiration, purpose or propulsion in a person's life. Behind determination and endurance is ambition ignition or re-ignition. An attitude of "I want" is the antecedent of "I will".

"CARDIAC RESERVE": persons and/or experiences which cause a person to feel valuable, worthwhile or connected to others; to feel loved, cared for or important. The emotional heart must be maintained in such a ways that emotional damage can be prevented or healed. Warmth and worth, in tangent, are roots of all human behavior.

COMPETENCY TRAINING: training or instruction for competence in any area of production, expression or knowledge acquisition. Beyond schooling, competency training is the development of proficiency, virtuosity or creativity rather than mere " "right-answer giving". Competence is critical for reaching one's potential.

OPPORTUNITY "RAMRODS": persons, experiences, activities or change agents which "open doors" to progress, tear down "walls" which hinder, break through "glass ceilings" or other obstructions to success. The existence of opportunities is useless to those who have no access to those opportunities.

INSIGHT "DIVIDENDS": the benefits, rewards or profit gained from awareness, raised consciousness or in-depth understanding of cognitive, social, psychological, technical and/or spiritual domains. Progress toward success is proportionate to one's amount of insight.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the empowerment goals of the project, a critical social science approach was used. According to Shor (1980), "Humanistic methods without critical content ...cannot help students become subjects capable of using critical knowledge to transform their world (p. 47). Therefore, qualitative methods were chosen to engage students in a process which was both emancipatory in content and liberating in process. That is, the project experience would increase participants' ability to become successful as they increase their understanding of success.

Reaching the goals of the project required a two-part design. Phase I was the indepth study of successful lives to discern the critical factors which lead to success. This phase was conducted with four graduate counselor trainees at South Carolina State University. The group examined the autobiographies of four successful persons--Dr.Maya Angelou, Zora Neal Hurston, John H. Johnson and Malcolm X. The participants' task, during a four-week period in 1991, was to determine the critical success factors in each life. Intercoder reliability was established for the autobiographical analyses. After determining the critical success factors in each life, the group analyzed the factors to determine those factors which were common to all of the successful lives. Six essential factors or "common fibers" were identified and developed into the Success "Fibers" Model of Development (Figure 1).

Phase II of the project research was conducted during the fall of 1993, after several piloting versions of the project. Participants were asked to follow the procedures outlined in Table 1. The program which was produced as a result of the project is presented in Appendix A. After using an experiential, emancipatory approach to the study of success, an open-ended survey was given to participants to determine the effects of the project upon them.

Table 1. "RECONSTRUCTING" Project Procedures

READ an autobiography or biography of a famous, successful person. The choice is made by participants or assigned according to the particular type of project. Complete the Cover Sheet.

ANALYZE the person's life by identifying significant or critical factors which led to the person's success. These can include persons, or experiences, early or later in life, which influenced this person's eventual success. (The Success "Threads" Model in Figure 1 can be used as a guide; however, participants must identify factors they consider to have been significant in the person's success.) Complete at least six (6) Analytical Worksheets.

RECONSTRUCT the person's life. Remove one or more of the critical success factors, noted in step two, and rewrite the outcome of the person's life without that factor. Complete at least two (2) Conjecture Worksheets.

APPLY lessons learned about success factors to your own life. List at least three personal goals or possibilities for your life, and identify factors needed for you to reach your goals or your potential. Complete at least three (3) Trajectory Worksheets.

FINDINGS

The survey responses showed positive impact of the "Reconstructing" Lives project on all participants. Participants reported the development of a sense of empowerment in four categories: (1) increased insight, (2) increased encouragement, (3) new awareness of possibilities for personal success and (4) actual behavior changes and plan for behavior changes to create personal success. The findings are reported in Tables 2-5.

FURTHER RESEARCH

As a result of the positive effects reported by project participants and by project evaluators, a workbook has been developed for use in Phase III of "Reconstructing" Lives. Sample worksheets from the workbook are presented in Appendix B. During the 1996-97 school year, Phase III participants will take personal development pretests, engage in the project experience and take posttests to determine additional impact of the project in an effort to help students reach their potential.

Table 2. Trajectory - Change Statements: Insight

-"This book affected me due to the change we made (in Carson's life) in the skits. It shows how one can remove something out of a person's life and change the total outcome of that life. Ben Carson had many struggles, but something and someone was always there to the rescue. By doing this skit, it shows how every thing in life matters." (Jannard Rainey)

-"Dr. Benjamin Carson was an inspirational person who showed me that the medical profession is not "lily white"....His life has also shown me how God can help you achieve. His story inspired me to also want to have a closer bond with God. Ben Carson's mother showed me what is wrong with today's children and why they are not succeeding. First, there is too much television, and secondly, there is too little motivation." (Tomirra Calahan)

-I see how people, experiences, or just one person can make a big difference in a person's life. At first, I couldn't discipline myself to read her book, but as I got into it, it became easy and enjoyable...I didn't realize that things have happened in my life have also happened to Maya Angelou.

-I enjoyed this project and found it fun to change someone's destiny. So many times we "play life by ear" and never think about the consequences of our actions. I think that if we would think before we act sometimes, we would come out a lot better all the time.

-The project made me realize the importance of positive influences and realize I can be a positive influence in some kid's life when I start teaching.

-The study enabled me to see how to take advantage of elements of success.

-I realized how encouragement can really play a major role in a young person's life.

-I discovered I could read a whole book.

-I can relate to him and appreciate my mother's love more than before.

-This showed me an avenue to life I didn't think was too serious: "Having positive people around make a difference."

-I was better able to appreciate that success is not one-dimensional. Many factors interact to produce success.

-This project has opened my eyes to the lives of others...It also made me appreciate people in my life. I also realize without them my life would have greatly differed.

-I have "come to see" my mother differently, to appreciate her more.
We can all draw inspiration from Carson's tenacity.

Table 3. Trajectory - Change Statement: Encouragement

-"The Ben Carson project affect me in Several different ways. First, reading the book...gave me a sound perspective on success. Secondly, I got to personally know more of my classmates. Finally, reading about Ben Carson's life and his hard work actually put the spotlight on my life and how I work to get what I want. Actually, the project couldn't have come at a better time. Every semester, I'm stressed out during final week and always need to be reminded of the reason I must work hard and how it pays off in the end." (Clevoshonda Jones)

-"I always felt that as long as my parents believed in me that I will succeed, but I guess you do need outside encouragement and support...In a society where we, African American males, are being portrayed as gang members and killers, it is truly refreshing to read about one of us who rose above that. The story should be placed in all innercity schools so they can relate to someone who is alive and came from where they came from." (Apollos Harris)

-"In beginning, I wasn't really interested in reading the book at all. Once I began reading, I did become involved in Dr. Carson's life. The part of his life that affected me most was his spiritual belief that a higher being makes things happen--not to say that I don't believe in that same spiritual being...I also believe that we are all put on this earth for a purpose and I am pleased to have read the book and will encourage others to read it also." (Sentoria Clay)

-The project gave me encouragement.

-I found encouragement and motivation in this activity.

-The project gave me a message: "Never give up!"

Table 4 : Trajectory - Change Statement: Possibilities

-"The Ben Carson study had a positive effect on me... Having positive people and things in your life can make a difference no matter how many negative things surround you...I have come to see my mother as having similar characteristics to Sonya Carson. Most can make a difference in my life; it is never too late." (Marshelia Richardson)

-"Carson affected me in many ways but most of all, he has encouraged me more to teach. Through teaching, I can be there for the "Carson" in my class. I can be there when they don't know which way to turn..." (Dalan Sharpe)

-I still can make a difference in my life.

-I can make a difference in my future students' lives.

-I learned I have no excuse for failure...I can achieve my goals.

-The project about the on disadvantaged students.

-The project showed me the possibilities for African Americans.

-I've gained insight, knowledge and intrinsic motivation...I can succeed!

Table 5: Trajectory - Change Statement: Action

-"The Carson study affected me in a very positive way. Sometimes, it is hard to believed that when you are faced with so many obstacles that it is still possible to achieve success. The Carson study inspired me to face my obstacles, head on, to overcome and even to adjust to different situations in my life for the purpose of succeeding." (Kanetra Holmes)

-The project of "Reconstructing" Lives a had profound effect on me. Our project was based o Maya Angelou's life. As I listened to the presentations of other famous lives, I realized they all had things in common: They all had times of tragedy but prevailed in the end to become famous successful people. Doing this project made me take a closer look at my life and my children's lives. (Marilyn Warren)

-Taking a look at the lives of others has given me a chance to take a long look at my own life. I couldn't look at someone else without taking inventory on myself...I enjoyed the project, and I think it will help me with my studies next year. Also, I have a greater desire now to give back to my community.

-In reconstructing the life of Nathan McCall, I learned a lot about determination and self fulfillment...I took some ideas for myself from the presentations to take a look at my own life. I have a better understanding of how people...even experiences can help shape a person's life. ...These presentations gave me some ideas on how to do my job in the future.

-The project showed me I have wasted a lot of time and prime opportunities, but I plan to change.

-I learned to appreciate myself...I was getting relaxed, but there is no time for "half stepping".

-The project caused me to start look for role models..It gave me encouragement and determination.

-I was enlightened and began looking at my own life and paying closer attention to success factors.

EVALUATION OF PROJECT

The purpose of the project is to study success in such a way that participants not merely leave the experience with a pithy social formula or with knowledge of the "secrets of success" but rather leave with a sense of empowerment for creating their own success. A group of six graduate students in Teacher Education participated in the evaluation of the "RECONSTRUCTING" LIVES Project. After full participation in the project experience, they deemed the project a positive and powerful experience, appropriate for both high school and university level students. Furthermore, the evaluators found that the major goal of the project, to develop a sense of empowerment, was achieved. A summary of their evaluation is presented below.

1. Rather than the traditional summarizing of events in a famous person's life, project participants identified, analyzed and evaluated critical, transformative factors which led to the person's eventual success.

3. Rather than noting the achievements of a successful person, participants noted the number and severity of the challenges, obstacles, limitations which the successful person had to overcome.

2. Rather than listing critical influences, participants described, clarified and/or illuminated particular behaviors, strategies, knowledge, types of experiences which made a difference in achieving goals or overcoming obstacles. They explained the ways by which the influences changed, developed or transformed the person being studied.

4. Rather than noting differences between themselves and famous persons, participants found the similarties between their own struggles and strengths and those of the famous person.

5. Rather than considering following in the "footsteps" of the famous person or "copying" exact behaviors, participants focused on and developed personal goals and proceeded to discern factors needed for their personal success.

6. Rather than admiring or standing in awe of famous persons, participants outlined plans and began taking actions to make changes or create transformations which can lead to success in their own lives.

The evaluators also noted the strong cognitive and affective impact of the project experience.

REFERENCES

Carson, Ben and C. Murphey. Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990.

Glaser, B. and A. Strauss. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. Chicago: Aldine Publishing col, 1967.

Shor, Ira. Critical Teaching and Everyday Life. Boston: South End Press, 1980.

APPENDIX A

New Rocky Valley Baptist Church
109 Grand Avenue
Grambling, LA 71245

Rev. Lee Johnson, Sr., *Pastor*

A Reading Club for "Reconstructing" Lives

Dedication Program
Presented by the
Fall 1993
Educational Psychology Class
December 11, 1993
6:00 pm

Club Calendar

December 1993
Dedication Program: The Life of Dr. Ben Carson Gifted Hands

January 1994
Life of Maya Angelou: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

February
The Life of John H. Johnson Succeeding Against the Odds

March
The Life of Dr. Howard Thurman: With Head and Heart

April
The Life of Oprah Winfrey: Oprah

September
The Life of Dr. Benjamin Mays: Born to Rebel

October
The Life of Kody Scott: Monster: The Autobiography of a LA Gang Member

November
The Life of Justice Thurgood Marshall:
Dream Makers, Dream Breakers

December
Christmas Finale
Coordinator: Mrs. Catherine McNeal

The "Reconstructed" Life of Dr. Ben Carson, M. D.

Programme

The Preface..... Dr. Nanthalia W. McJamerson

Solo....."The Wind Beneath My Wings".....Miss April Hearn

Vignette 1: Carson's Life *Without* Parental Strategies
Vignette 2: Carson's Life *Without* Role Models
Vignette 3: Carson's Life *Without* Encouragement
Vignette 4: Carson's Life *Without* Leadership Experiences

Musical Interlude

Vignette 5: Carson's Life *Without* Faith In God
Vignette 6: Carson's Life *Without* Support Groups
Vignette 7: Carson's Life *Without* Insightful Experiences

The Epilogue.....Apollos Harris

Introduction of Judges.....Mr. William Arrington

Presentation of Awards.....Mrs. Lottie Green

Dedication Prayer.....Rev. Lee Johnson, Sr., *Pastor*
New Rocky Valley Baptist Church

Recognitions & Closing.....Dr. Jeanette Hutchinson

Judges

Dr. Ruth Bradford
Mrs. Mary A. Hobdy
Ms. Nedra Johnson
Mrs. Hazel J. Jones
Mrs. Valena Lane
Dr. Alma Woodard

Purpose of the Reading Club

The Reading Club was created to help persons reach their God-given potential. Such success cannot be left to chance. Club Members will search for the "ingredients" of success through the indepth study of autobiographies or biographies. By "reconstructing" the lives of famous persons, participants will be empowered to more effectively "construct" successful lives for themselves and for others.

Membership

There is no monetary fee, however, a *commitment* is required for Reading Club membership. Members must read autobiographies or biographies of famous persons in the sequence noted on the Club Calendar. Participation in the creative club activities is also required.

Club Benefits

Contest Prizes (shopping sprees, school supplies, gift certificates, travel opportunities, etc.)
Counseling and/or Rap Sessions
Dinners
Inspirational Souvenirs by: Positive JMC Black Images, Inc.
P. O. Drawer 608
Grambling, LA 71245

APPENDIX B

"RECONSTRUCTING" LIVES

Cover Sheet

Studying the Life of

_____

Studied by

_____

(Name of Participant)

Major Achievements And/Or Legacy Of This Person:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Career Title(s): _____

_____

Date _____

Analytical Worksheet: Demystifying Success

_____

While studying the life of _____, I noted the following major influences upon his/her success.

_____

Obstacle No. _____

One major obstacle, challenge or limitation in this person's life was:

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Factor No. _____ _____

One factor which helped overcome the obstacle (for example, helped the person feel valuable, or helped obtain opportunities, or helped gain knowledge or insight, etc.) was: _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Conjecture Worksheet: What Might Have Been!

_____

After completing my study of the life of _____,
I will engage in conjecture and "reconstruct" this life by removing success factors.

_____

If Factor No. _____,

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____, _____

had not been a part of this person's _____
life, then the outcome would have
been different. _____

Without this factor, the following types of events or changes may have taken place: _____

Then this person could have become a _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Trajectory Worksheet: What I Can Become ! ! !

A GOAL OR POSSIBILITY FOR MY LIFE:

Studying the life of _____ taught me something about my present life and my future goals.

If I can receive, look for, fight for, work for or get help with this factor, _____

then I can make a change in one part of my present life in order to reach my future goals.

This is a description of a change I can make to help me reach one or more of my future goals: _____